

**Public Testimony to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Judicial and
Corrections on Governor's Proposed FY 24-25, Budget, H.B. 6659
Connecticut Justice Alliance (CTJA)**

Friday, February 24, 2023

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Exum, Representative Paris and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Christina Quaranta. I am Executive Director of the Connecticut Justice Alliance. Connecticut Justice Alliance is a youth/adult partnership, statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending the criminalization of Connecticut's youth. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the Governor's proposed budget as it relates to Judicial Branch: Court Support Services Division and the Department of Correction (DOC).

In the governor's budget there is a proposal to close the Willard Correctional Facility, this would result in a \$6.5 million annual savings. We believe that these dollars should be invested back in to communities that have been most impacted by incarceration and the legal system. The dollars should also be used to increase funding for community programs that have been proven to help people stay out of prison and programs that meet basic needs and address root causes of crime and poverty. These millions of dollars of savings must be directly reinvested into the people of Connecticut, not absorbed back into Connecticut's general fund. Rep. Christopher Rosario, along with others spoke about this in a [recent OpEd in the Connecticut Mirror](#). The \$6.5 million savings could also be used to address the issue of children being housed in adult prison. The state must commit to doing better for our young people and adult prison, no matter the charge, is not the appropriate place for a young person if the goal is to rehabilitate them and have them grow to be successful young people. While the work is being done to create a plan, craft programming and supports, and find suitable locations for young people; conditions for young people must be improved. DOC must commit to, and use the \$6.5 million savings, ending the use of confinement of young people, ending the use of chemical agents on young people, and address the educational and mental health needs of use. In December of 2021, the Department of Justice [found](#) that Manson Youth Institution (MYI) was violating children's civil rights. The question still remains, what's being done to address that?

DOC must commit to removing all youth under the age of 18 from adult facilities pre- and post-trial:

- No child under the age of 18 should be in an adult correctional setting, even if their case is transferred to the adult court. Boys must be removed from Manson Youth Institution and girls from York Correctional Institution (the only prison for women in Connecticut).
- Locking up youth in adult prison does not address root issues. According to a [recent state audit](#), the overwhelming majority of transferred boys, and all of the transferred girls, in the adult system during 2019 lived in families previously investigated for child abuse or neglect, often multiple times.

The audit found that most boys in the system completed few or no programs while incarcerated. Young people will most likely be unable to change behaviors until their root issues are addressed and taken care of.

- Young people are subject to being assaulted with chemical agents as a behavioral deterrent, intervention during fights, or in a threatening manner. This is damaging to young peoples' health and numerous states have outlawed the use of chemical agents on children. CTJA has [research](#) re: chemical agent use that it would be happy to share with the legislature. CTJA is willing to work with DOC and other organizations and state agencies to figure out what can be used instead of chemical agents. [CT is one of 23 states who houses children in adult prison.](#)
- Transferring youth to adult court does not reduce violence or enhance public safety. In 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published the findings of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services which said:
 - Available evidence indicates that transfer to the adult criminal justice system typically increases rather than decreases rates of violence among transferred youth. Available evidence was insufficient to determine the effect of transfer laws and policies on levels of violent crime in the overall juvenile population. On the basis of these findings, the Task Force recommends against laws or policies facilitating the transfer of juveniles to the adult criminal justice system for the purpose of reducing violence. [emphasis ours]
- In CT, black youth are more likely to be transferred to the adult court than their white peers. If a youth is between 15- and 17-years-old and charged with certain Class B felonies, the prosecutor can ask for a hearing in front of a judge to transfer the case to the adult system. A 2017 report on Connecticut data found that, in these cases, black youth were much more likely to be transferred to adult court than their white peers. The study looked at other factors like age, previous record, charge, socioeconomic status, etc. to see if they explained the different outcomes, but found that race was the deciding factor. This study tells us that our current method of transferring some youth under the 18 is not fair or equitable and should be ended. There is also updated information that can be found in [this](#) Connecticut Mirror article from September 2020.
- How many youth are we talking about? On any given day there are about 50 boys under the age of 18 in MYI. The number of girls in York is very small, rarely going above 3 on any given day. (While conditions faced by girls in York are better than those for boys in MYI, federal law requires youth under 18 to be separated from adults even when they are in the same facility. As a result, girls in York can be alone for a majority of their confinement.)

We are pleased to see investment in the Community Support Services line item, however more information is needed on what those services include and their success rate and rate of participation.

The \$888,888 that is adding 15 correction officers to monitor communication from prison, following the statutory change that made communication free, therefore increasing communication, could absolutely be better spent on reentry services for those exiting prison (especially young people), more mental health staff, credible messengers working within the prisons (especially Manson Youth Institute) ie: modeled like the TRUE Unit, and on better overall care for those who are incarcerated. We recently visited the men inside the TRUE Unit and we were shown around, one of the places we saw was the laundry area. The men pay for their laundry to be done, and one of the men who is incarcerated there owns the laundry service as a business. He expressed the need for a new washer and dryer- they are using, for a unit of over 50 men, a washer and dryer that is not commercial grade and they are getting worn out. We also saw the barbershop there needs equipment. In the governor's budget, there is only \$3,000 allotted to Aid to Paroled and Discharged Inmates- we believe that some of the money set aside to monitor phone calls should be placed here. One of the most critical times in ones involvement with the legal system is when they are exiting it. Without proper support, a person will be unable to maintain a safe and productive lifestyle outside of the structure and walls of prison. This may cause the person to return, which would be tragic. There are countless better ways to spend almost a million dollars than on more surveillance. CTJA has information heard from young people and correctional staff about the needs of those incarcerated- surely, if Connecticut is serious about caring for all children, the governor would invest the \$6.5 million in savings back into communities, into improving conditions of confinement, and in making a concerted effort to remove children from adult prison.

In the governor's budget, the Judicial Branch: Court Support Services Division (JBCSSD) is expected to receive \$1.5 million in cuts to its funding. More information is needed about these proposed cuts to "achieve savings" that fund nonprofit services. The reductions total: \$750,000 cut from Juvenile Alternative Incarceration, \$375,000 cut from Juvenile Justice Outreach Services, and \$375,000 cut from Board and Care for Children – Short-term and Residential. We echo our points from above, that at a time when the care of children in crisis makes headlines almost daily- having such severe cuts without explanation to services that are meant to supervise and care for children, does not make sense. As well established and effective programs go away, the pressure to go back to frequent detention and incarceration grows. Aside from the moral issues surrounding using detention and incarceration when we know it's not the best way to change youth behavior and disproportionately impacts children of color, the idea that detention and incarceration are somehow cost neutral is flawed. Our current system disproportionately harms Black and Brown youth. Connecticut incarcerates youth of color at significantly higher rates than it does white youth. This is unacceptable. [Source 1.](#) [Source 2.](#)

Locking up youth is costly and ineffective. Data shows that youth who are detained or incarcerated may be more likely to reoffend than their peers who aren't, meaning that

using detention and incarceration can have the opposite effect that people are hoping for. According to the Judicial Branch of CT, Court Support Services Division, (detention) residential centers and the REGIONS units inside the (detention) residential centers costs \$861.77 per child per day (as of 2/4/2022). In 2021, the average length of a stay in (detention) residential centers was **23** days - that's **\$19,820.71** spent each time we put a child in juvenile (detention) residential centers, assuming daily cost hasn't increased. The cost to detain girls under 18 in (detention) residential centers is even more expensive. Hartford Healthcare at Natchaug Hospital's Journey House costs \$951.70 per child per day (as of 2/4/2022). In 2021, the average length of a stay in (detention) residential centers was **23-36** days - that's **\$21,889.10-\$34,261.20** spent each time we put a child in juvenile (detention) residential centers, assuming daily cost hasn't increased. The locked facility in Hamden (REGIONS), run by Community Partners in Action costs **\$1,423.69** per day. The average length of stay for REGIONS in Hamden is 36 days. That means we are spending **\$51,252.84** per child when we are incarcerating them in a youth facility. Using [these](#) average daily population numbers **only** for REGIONS facilities, Connecticut spends about **\$9,096,066.45 per year incarcerating young people** in locked facilities run by the Judicial Branch: Court Support Services Division (not including detention). This calculation does not include the staff secure facilities that the Judicial Branch: Court Support Services operates (these cost \$881.81 per day, per child)

The **more than 10 million dollars** that is spent incarcerating young people in locked facilities, run by JBCSSD) would be better spent on front end diversion services, addressing the root causes of crime and poverty through assistance and other forms of aide, mentors and credible messengers, and adding additional [Youth Advocate Program](#) sites throughout Connecticut. We know through [data](#) collected the parts of the states that these young people are coming from. Why not start by directly investing in [these](#) communities.

Finally, funding should be allocated to the Judicial Branch: Court Support Services Division to devise a plan to house children removed from adult prison. The branch did some in a submitted plan in January of 2022, [but the proposed setting was unacceptable, the Connecticut Juvenile Training School.](#)

Governor Lamont's budget does not make the system whole- more funding is needed for intensive, community based, wrap around services for young people and their families. When the system isn't whole, children and communities are not whole. Without the right services, more kids are funneled into detention or out of home placements. Connecticut can and must do better for our youth.

Connecticut has made great policy strides in the past decade years. It changed its laws to say that the courts are not the appropriate place to handle youth who don't go to school. It changed its laws to say that detention isn't the appropriate place for kids who are suicidal or who don't have a safe place to live. It closed its youth prison, the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, in response to research showing that

incarcerating youth in large, institutional prisons does not promote public safety, data showing high re-offending rates among boys leaving CJTS and concerns about the conditions of confinement for those confined at the prison. Connecticut must continue the difficult and honorable work of addressing the root needs of young people and further decreasing the number of young people inside of the DOC and the prisons and facilities operated by the JBCSSD. Yes, the numbers are declining in terms of the number of youth incarcerated and detained since 2006. That is a win. However, the number has not declined as dramatically for Black and Brown youth, and that is a problem.

We urge Governor Lamont and the legislature to invest in young people, their families, and communities. The legislature has the responsibility as elected officials to act in a preventative, positive manner to aid young people. Young people need is investment of time, resources, love. Young people need to see credible messengers working in the programs and schools they are a part of. Young people need to stop being criminalized and they must be removed from adult prison in a thoughtful manner. We believe that the budget of Connecticut is a racial justice document that reflects its priorities and young people should be the number one priority of folks in places where high level and important decisions are being made.

Sincerely,

Christina Quaranta
Executive Director
Connecticut Justice Alliance